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## Letting Guilt Within The Walls: Colonial Ideology and Le Guin's Literature of Resistance

Literature of resistance, such as Ursula Le Guin's, "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" (1973), is a powerful means of articulating cultural commentary. It attempts to dismantle and/or expose the ideological framework in place while allowing a creative space for alternative ideologies. Through acknowledging the ideologies and exposing the underlying assumptions of the city to readers, "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" functions as a counter-discourse to the seemingly inescapable discourse of domination and colonial control. It belongs to a larger tradition of literature that challenges dominant discourses by generating alternatives and providing counter-narratives. According to Helen Tiffin, "Post-colonial counter-discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from a cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified 'local'" (98). In this text, the narrator articulates a cross-cultural standpoint which helps to reveal the colonial underpinnings of Omelas. Although imperfect, literature of resistance creates a site of opposition and reflection. This literary tradition creates a space to question, challenge, and expose invisible ideologies. Judith Caesar describes the role of Le Guin's work as a postcolonial author, explaining, "Le Guin implies complex and nuanced answers to the questions she raises about power, control, and resistance. They are writers' answers, not those of an anthropologist or a political theorist, and thus they are ambiguous, suggestive, and metaphorical, designed to evoke thought rather than suggest specific

solutions” (50). Rather than create conclusions, Le Guin advances an examination that invites dialogue to counter the unexamined assumptions of ideology.

The dynamics of power in the city of Omelas are very useful as a cultural mirror for readers. Le Guin’s approach to this cultural commentary is effective because Omelas shares the ideological power structures which are found in most industrialized cultures. These ideologies often justify the suffering or deprivation of a specific group for the benefit of others. The disproportionate power distribution is often justified as something which is best for the common good or something which is merited by those in power, often because of a flaw on the part of the oppressed. Although it is not characterized as the United States of America, Omelas bears significant similarities to the United States. The city is a unique space created by Le Guin which is paradoxically different but comparable to the culture from which the story emerges and is received.

Ursula Le Guin constructs a “utopian” society which is a beautiful, thriving city free of hierarchy in the short story “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas.” A significant portion of the story envisions the utopia and describes it to the reader. The narrator’s description encourages readers to see Omelas as a real place, sometimes to the extent that the “realness” of the city is forced. The details of the city are described to create a tangible city rather than a detached, utopian fantasy. The people of the city are described as intelligent and happy, not altogether different from readers. The narrator reveals that although splendid, the city is predicated on the suffering of one child; its<sup>1</sup> suffering is essential to the happiness of the city.

Citizens of Omelas believe that it is only through the suffering of the child that they can thrive,

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<sup>1</sup> Readers will notice I am replicating the objectifying language used in the story to describe the child. The child is not named and the child’s gender is not specified. The child is referred to simply as “it.” Throughout this essay I am choosing to participate in the dehumanization of this child in order to preserve the language of the colonizer and reinforce the effects of colonizing views. Using less colonizing language would, in my opinion, dilute the impact of the story by downplaying the extent of colonial violence and usurpation the child suffers.

although no proof of this belief is advanced. The conditions of the Omelasians' bargain are important for readers to understand because of the dichotomy of superior/inferior they create and their implications in terms of power.

One of the fundamental characteristics of Omelas is its colonization of the child in the closet. The city can be better understood as a cultural commentary by linking it with colonialism and examining the city through a postcolonial lens. Colonialism is characterized by its domination. Reinhard defines this domination, maintaining, "[Colonialism is] one people's control over another people through the economic, political, and ideological exploitation of a development gap between the two." (Reinhard 1). Within the fictional city, it becomes apparent that the citizens exercise total control over the child. Science fiction creates a city where the colonization of the child is representative of an entire group. They exploit its conditions and, through that exploitation, create a gap between themselves and the child. The child cannot thrive or hope to achieve the status of the citizens.

The colonial mindset in the city of Omelas controls the narrative considerably. The polarizing nature of colonialism is demonstrated through the juxtaposition of the perfection of Omelas and the degradation of the child in the closet. The contrast between the child and Omelas as it pertains to colonialism is explained by Michel-Rolph Trouillot. He explains a characteristic of colonialism, asserting that the conquest of America, and by extension Omelas, serves as the European constitution of the Other. In Le Guin's story, the suffering of the child constitutes the city's perfection. He elaborates, stating, "the utopian West is first in the construction of this complimentary. It is the first observed face of the figure, the initial projection against which the savage becomes a reality. The savage makes sense only in terms of utopia" (30). Similarly, the Omelasians' believe their entire way of life is constituted, characterized, and

marked by the suffering of the child and their perceived utopian joy. Their colonization affects almost all of the city's existence. For example, the lavish descriptions of the city and prosperity of Omelas demonstrate the material benefits reaped by colonization at the cost of the colonized. The city's silence regarding the child mirrors the silencing of counter-colonial discourse and the negation of the Other.

The ideology of the Omelasians mimics colonial ideology in the sense that it creates a way of life built upon oppression that is seemingly natural and inescapable. Life outside of the existing system is unimaginable to the extent that maintaining the present oppressive conditions is more desirable than allowing freedom. The rationale behind keeping the child in the closet is (re)inforced by the epistemological framework of the Omelasians. According to George Yancy, their culture embodies colonial ideology because, "Blacks (or those who are colonized) are over-determined from the outside, pre-marked, prefigured aesthetically as ugly, fixed as immoral, and zoologically categorized as primitive animals. On this score, new knowledge (non-alienating and counter-colonialist knowledge) of the Black body is always already epistemologically foreclosed" (8). In Omelas, any counter-colonialist knowledge of the child is foreclosed by the insistence that the child is kept safe by the walls, better off within them, and that its happiness is too minute to account for the suffering of thousands. The colonialist ideology is so ingrained in Omelas that an alternative is wholly unintelligible. Those who choose to remove themselves from the colony and "walk away from Omelas" enter a space unknown to readers, the narrator, and Omelasians. This foreclosure of knowledge is demonstrated when the narrator grapples with the space outside of Omelas, stating, "The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not

exist” (284). Within the epistemological framework of Omelas, there is no imaginable space or alternative to the domination of the child.

The fictional space created in “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” distances readers from their cultural baggage and enables more objective cultural critiques. Omelas is a city outside of history, geopolitical localities, time, and economics. Although outside of these constructs, the city can be easily compared to most industrialized nations. Furthermore, readers are invited by Le Guin to connect Omelas with the U.S. in its preface in a short description of the passage which inspired it. Le Guin credits William James’s essay “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” as an inspiration for her story. Le Guin’s explicit connection in the preface indicates to readers that this story is not a whimsical tale but instead a story that can and should be grounded in the reality of readers.

The passage excerpted from James’s essay advances a scenario offering the permanent happiness of many in exchange for the “lonely torment” of a “certain lost soul” (275). This philosophical hypothesis is answered in his essay but is complicated by Le Guin. In response to his proposition James asserts, “Even though an impulse arose within us to clutch at the happiness so offered, how hideous a thing would be its enjoyment when deliberately accepted as the fruits of such a bargain?” (275). His hypothetical situation creates the foundation upon which Le Guin builds Omelas. The inherent connection between James’s essay and “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” is demonstrated in Le Guin’s introduction to the story. She writes, “The dilemma of the American conscience can hardly be stated” in response to the excerpt from James (275). The story applies James’ abstract hypothesis and invites readers to do the same. By creating James’s lonely soul and shrouding it in a fictional utopian community, Le Guin explores the true implications of the deplorable bargain and the colonization it represents. Her analysis extends

itself beyond philosophical speculation and creates a complex society which takes this bargain and enjoys the benefits from the exchange.

“The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” blurs the divisions between utopia and dystopia and explores them within a framework that is recognizable to readers. The framework is one which embodies the discourses of the United States. In addition to the uncanny familiarity of Omelas, the narrator’s use of shifting pronouns in the story work to disorient the reader, making it difficult to distinguish between the “us” alliance between the reader and the narrator, the “they” of the Omelasians, the “I” of the narrator, and the direct “you” addressed to readers. The disorientation caused by the shifting pronouns and their ambiguous inclusivity simultaneously distances and immerses readers in the story, creating an allegorical city which challenges their postcolonial cultural baggage and the hegemonic standpoint of colonialism. Subsequently distancing and interposing readers in the reality of a city which embodies this problematic cultural framework. This essay will explore the ways in which the descriptions of the child, citizens of Omelas, city of Omelas, and the narrative the city uses to explain the child all closely mirror colonial discourse and its totalizing effect.

The condition of the “lonely soul” of Omelas is truly deplorable. The child is described as feeble-minded, malnourished, and hunched into the smallest corner of the tiny room. Its life is lived in complete isolation and fear at the mercy of its captors. The descriptions of the child and its conditions parallel the language frequently used to describe the Other, and in colonial framework, represents the colonized. Regardless of whether an Other is differentiated by race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc. an Other is always defined in opposition to the dominant group. In the case of Omelas, the child’s closet is described in contrast with the bright, fantastical descriptions of the city and its people. The child’s containment contrasts with the

innate freedom of the people of Omelas. Importantly, it embodies the polar opposite of the condition of the people of Omelas and is therefore characterized as the inferior Other.

The child's description echoes modern descriptions of the so-called Third World and reflects the devastation it endures. Readers are informed that the child is hunched over and "is so thin there are no calves to its legs; its belly protrudes... it is naked. Its buttocks and thighs are a mass of festered sores, as it sits in its own excrement continually" (281). Jerre Collins calls attention to this disturbing parallel, writing, "The passage closes with a physical description of the child, a description familiar to us from the photo-journalism of war, displacement, and famine" (526). This description correlates with the trope of the colonized Other as described by its colonizers. Its lack of physical health and hygiene contrasts sharply with the descriptions of the people of Omelas. They have flowers "in their shining hair" and laugh together, enjoying the perfection of the city (278). In comparison with the Omelasians, the child and its conditions are constructed in a manner that is diametrically opposed to those of Omelas. Furthermore, the condition of the child parallels the famine and displacement characterized by Collins.

The child's deprivation includes, but is not limited to, its nutrition, education, cognizance of the outside world, social interaction, sexual expression, religious expression, physical touch, speech, familial relations, adequate living conditions, medical care, and physical movement. All of these deprivations contribute to the child's physical diminutiveness and misery. George Yancy describes the power of domination in shaping the reality of the subordinate, explaining, "Colonialism is a form of violent usurpation that disrupts the psychosocial equilibrium of those indigenous to their lived cultural cosmos. This outside power/violence interrupts 'their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance'" (4). The narrator explains that the child



remembers its life prior to captivity and sometimes speaks, but is feeble-minded in the conditions of its captivity. The child's usurpation arrests its development, making the child's age indistinguishable and interrupts its entire identity. The child is no longer recognizable as a citizen of Omelas and is damaged by the violence it suffers.

The child's identity is further stripped by its lack of social interaction and extreme isolation. Every interaction the child has is controlled by its social positioning as the colonized Other. For example, the narrator describes the interactions the child has with visitors, explaining, "Sometimes the door rattles terribly and opens, and a person, or several people, are there. One of them may come in and kick the child to make it stand up. The others never come close, but peer in at it with frightened, disgusted eyes" (281). These instances characterize the child as a "thing," an object of their gaze, which is to be controlled and is repulsive to the colonizers. George Yancy addresses this totalizing function of colonialism, asserting, "In the context of colonialism, there is no 'human contact' as Césaire (1972) maintains, 'but relations of domination and submission' (p. 21). When the colonizer and the colonized are face-to-face, Césaire (1972) sees only 'force, brutality, cruelty, sadism, conflict' (p. 21)" (6). In Omelas, the child is never granted interactions outside of the dominator/dominated binary which controls its existence.

One of the most disturbing elements of their bargain is the child's physical containment. The closet is a coffin-like space, specifically described as three paces long and two paces wide (281). The child must share this tiny space with the two mops and a rusty bucket; fear of the mops and bucket drive the child to further limit its space. Readers are informed that the child "sits hunched in the corner farthest from the bucket and the two mops" (281). Its aversion to the mops dramatically reduces its already limited space. The child's fear of the mops causes it to close its eyes to pretend the mops are not in the closet. Although aware that the mops will always

be there the child closes its eyes, putting the nail in the coffin, so to speak, and once more limits its physical space within the closet. Controlling the space the child occupies is another means of domination. This domination demonstrates the totalizing nature of colonization. George Yancy explains this domination, asserting, “The ‘truth’ of the Black body is not outside the domain of white colonial power. White colonial power is exercised through its representational practices that actually constrain the Black body, passing over its embodied integrity and creating a chimera from its own imaginary” (13). Although the child’s race nor the race of the Omelasians is discussed, the comparison is relevant to postcolonial theory because it is a mechanism of subjugating the Other. The physical containment characteristic of colonization further demonstrates the totalizing nature of colonization, manifesting in the space the child occupies. This control is another example of colonizer-constructed reality which fundamentally asserts the inferiority of the colonized.

The child’s inferior social positioning is also demonstrated in the way it is treated. Food is given at the discretion of its captors and is rationed to half of a bowl of cornmeal and grease a day (281). The limited food it receives is fed to the child in a primate manner. The narrator describes the child’s feeding, explaining, “The food bowl and the water jug are hastily filled, the door is locked, the eyes disappear” (281). This manner of feeding closely relates to the way an animal, for example, a dog would be fed. There are no utensils or variety in the food and the child must eat in isolation. Furthermore, the hasty nature of the feeding mimics the way in which a dangerous, caged animal would be fed. The captor quickly unlocks the door, dispenses the food, and leaves. Once more, the child is treated as a savage or an animal. The child’s cornmeal provisions contrast strikingly with the “marvelous smell of cooking” in Omelas. This difference is emphasized when the narrator describes a citizen, stating, “In the benign grey beard of a man a

couple of crumbs of rich pastry are entangled” (280). The great opulence and indulgence of food in the city once more establishes their superiority in comparison with the child. The wealth of food in Omelas which is denied to the child demonstrates the choice of colonizers to deprive the colonized despite an excess of resources.

This mechanism of dichotomizing the child/citizens while privileging one of the two is characteristic of colonial domination. Postcolonial theory addresses this disparity, explaining, “Those subordinated were colorized and biologized, with skin color and other physical features negatively characterized and connected to their lower position at the bottom levels of the great chain of being” (Feagin 42). The great chain of being is articulated throughout the narrative and the child is clearly categorized at its bottom. The child is treated as an inferior, occupying the lowest levels of “the great chain of being.” It enjoys none of the privileges afforded to the citizens and is treated as subhuman. Its misery reasserts the ability of the colonizer to deprive the colonized to extreme extents. It demonstrates the total control exerted on the Other as a means of domination.

The child is defined as the embodiment of all of the things that the citizens of Omelas are not: a savage, uncivilized Other. Once captured and torn from its family the child loses its name, gender, family, comforts, and voice. The dramatic alteration of the child’s reality mirrors the extensive devastation often suffered by colonized peoples. The process of colonization denies the colonized the life and culture they were accustomed to prior to colonial invasion. Colonizers’ ability to (re)create the very existence of the colonized is an outward manifestation of domination. Amílcar Cabral expands on colonial intervention, asserting, “The experience of colonial domination shows that, in the effort to perpetuate exploitation, the colonizer... creates a system to repress the cultural life of the colonized people” (Williams 57). By isolating the child

and denying it everything from its life prior to its containment, Omelasians repress its cultural life in a manner consistent with the mechanisms of colonization. The existence of the colonized, like the existence of the child, is collapsed to its status as an Other and is shaped by the will of the colonizer. Domination denies the humanity and culture of the colonized either entirely or to the extent that their existence is seen as subhuman, inferior much like the child.

An essential function of colonial domination is its ability to control the aesthetics of the colonized as well as the way colonized is understood. George Yancy describes the phenomenon of characterizing the body of the Other in "Colonial Gazing: The Production Of The Body As 'Other.'" He elucidates the ways in which the description of the body of the subjugated Other is dichotomous to the depiction of the body of the dominant party. Yancy explains, "Within the hegemonic colonial order of things, the Black/native body bears the imprint of the colonial gaze, its myths and its lies. The imaginary projection upon the Black body becomes the imagined in the flesh... the Black body is also the object of colonial sadist brutality. The white colonial gaze is that broadly construed epistemic perspective, a process of seeing without being seen, that constructs the Black body into its own colonial imagery" (6). All of the imperfections of Omelas are projected onto the child and the way it is viewed. It bears all of the hideousness of the city. It is through its concealed suffering that the city is able to perpetuate its utopian myth. As an Other, the festering sores and emaciation of the child reflect the "sadist brutality" the citizens of Omelas inflict on it. The child's body is entirely controlled and regulated by the citizens of Omelas who show little concern for its condition. As subordinates of domination often are, the child is deprived to the point of incredulity.

The colonial gaze on the child is not limited to the gazed of Omelas. This gaze extends to the narrator and consequently to readers. The child's body is a spectacle for readers. By pulling back

the curtain for readers, the narrator reveals the grotesqueness of the deplorable child. Our probing eyes penetrate the closet and afford the child almost no privacy or decency. The contained spectacle of the child imitates the humiliation endured by Saartjie “Sarah” Baartman and other colonial victims. Furthermore, the spectacle echoes the display of animals in a zoo intended for the unabashed stares of onlookers (Yancy). This exhibition informs the way the child can be understood as an Other.

Within the ideology of Omelas the child’s existence is abhorrent and irreparable. As previously mentioned, this is demonstrated in the view of the colonizers. Its uncouth mannerisms are described by the narrator, who states, “It picks its nose and occasionally fumbles vaguely with its toes or genitals... the child has no understanding of time or interval” (281). Compared with the citizens of Omelas the child is savage and repulsive. It does not adhere to societal standards and is not granted customs associated with civilization. For example, the child does not have access to time or privacy.

The child’s clumsy fumbling with its genitals contrasts sharply with the people of Omelas who engage in orgies and experience sexual pleasure. The sexuality of the citizens is described, stating, “Surely the beautiful nudes can just wander about, offering themselves like divine soufflés to the hunger of the needy and the rapture of the flesh... Let tambourines be struck above the copulations, and the glory of desire be proclaimed upon the gongs, and (a not unimportant point) let the offspring of these delightful rituals be loved and looked after by all” (279). Compared to the people of Omelas, the child’s sexuality is extremely unorthodox and savage. Its fumbling cannot be described as a ritual and the child’s mangled body will never be characterized as a divine soufflé. The child’s sexuality is limited to groping itself with only the narrative gaze as a witness. This sexual isolation is once more juxtaposed to public orgies and

the communal responsibility for their offspring. Unlike the offspring, Omelas bears no communal responsibility for the child.

The deprivation of sexuality imposed on the child further parallels colonial domination because the colonized are denied sexual liberty. Colonial discourse views the sexual practices of the colonized as savage and promiscuous. As a result, their sexuality is regulated as much as possible. Forced sterilizations are an example of a common practice used by colonizers to control the “savage” population and limit the ability of the colonized to bear children (Reinhard). The child’s isolation forgoes the possibility of sexual intimacy with anyone else and denies it any possibility reproduction. Furthermore, as an object of the reader’s gaze, the child’s nudity is completely contrary to the “beautiful nudes” of Omelas: the child’s body is naked and “A mass of festering sores” (281). Its embodiment of sexuality could not be further distinguished from the sexuality of the Omelasians. Important to note in the binary created between the two types of sexuality is the obvious superiority of the sexuality of the citizens. Within the context of the story, the child’s inept, infected, excrement covered body makes the child sexually abject and adheres to the colonial discourse of the Other and by implication its sexuality. In comparison with the Omelasians, its practices are inherently inferior to the ritual serving of the beautiful soufflés.<sup>2</sup>

The totalized nature of the child’s existence emulates colonial discourse in the sense that the reality it knows is colonizer-centered; it is entirely determined in relation to and as a result of Omelas. This is demonstrated in its nutrition, sexuality, and the voyeuristic narrative. Its otherness defines it as everything that the people of Omelas are not. Unlike the colonized,

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<sup>2</sup> This claim is not inclusive and is very problematic. It is not intended to place a value judgment on the child’s sexuality or sexual practices. It is claim intended to contextualize the child’s sexuality. Within Omelas and dominant discourse, the child’s sexuality is viewed as deviant. The assertions of sexual inferiority are meant to represent dominant discourse and the discourse of the city.

colonizers are important and legitimate humans at the center of their constructed reality. This relationship is characteristic of colonialism, and is described as such:

*Colonialist ideology*, often referred to as *colonialist discourse* to mark its relationship to the language in which colonialist thinking was expressed, was based on the colonizers' assumption of their own superiority, which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native (indigenous) peoples, the original inhabitants of the lands they invaded...

Therefore, native peoples were defined as savage, backward, undeveloped...The colonizers saw themselves at the center of the world; the colonized were at the margins.

The colonizers saw themselves as the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper 'self.' (Tyson 366)

The child's tortured existence reflects the inherent belief of its inferiority and is the source of its cruel treatment. It is literally pushed to the margins of society and, subsequently, the furthest reaches of their consciences.

In contrast to the sparse descriptions of the child, the citizens of Omelas are characterized extensively. The narrator attempts to portray the citizens as ideal human beings. According to the narrator, "They were not naïve and happy children—though their children were, in fact, happy. They were mature, intelligent, passionate adults whose lives were not wretched" (278). Their lives are described vibrantly. A wide variety of citizens, both female and male, elderly and youth are accounted for in the narrator's descriptions. The narrator attempts to portray their identities as multifaceted by including their social interactions, hobbies, sexuality, celebrations, and talents. As a result, the Omelasians are described outside of the caricature of corrupt colonizers. Unlike the child, the narrator describes the Omelasians in a manner that characterizes them as complete human beings. Conversely, the child is only described in terms of its colonization and

is reduced to a caricature of the Other. The elaborate space and specificity dedicated to characterizing the Omelasians lends complexity to their identities, thus adding to their legitimacy. This enables readers to create a city and population they can fathom that is not solely characterized by its domination.

The exposition of the story encourages readers to create citizens who are in accord with Omelas. It follows then that the citizens will harmoniously match the perfection of the city itself. As mentioned previously, the descriptions of the Omelasians construct ideal, utopian citizens. Readers are enabled to see the people of Omelas, despite their colonization, “as the embodiment of what a human being should be” referred to in the excerpt above (366). The image of their superiority and impeccability is a compelling part of the narrative. Unexpectedly, readers must try to reconcile the exposure of their secrecy and exploitation with their initial characterization. The contradiction of their perfection and simultaneous violence creates a tension in the story. This tension is further demonstrated in the description of the child as Other and a product of their making. These contradictions emerge in colonial discourse in the complicated position of the colonizers as both tyrants and trailblazers. Although colonizers inflict incredible violence, they do so believing that it is their right to control a colony. This belief enforces the ideology that their colony is good and their actions are for the common good.

In addition to attempting to create complex citizens, the narrator attempts to describe the city as a plausible space. Readers are invited to construct a version of Omelas that truly suits their imagination, the narrator states, “Perhaps it would be best if you imagined it as your own fancy bids, assuming it will rise to the occasion, for certainly I cannot suit you all” (278). By enabling readers to imagine their own vision of Omelas the narrator allows complexities in the city which appeal to individual readers. Moreover, this invites critical readers to create a city without



complexity and without the narrator's instruction. Since the reality, dubious or intricate, is a product of their imagination, readers develop a more intimate investment in the city itself. The narrator's suggestion demonstrates the self-conscious will of the narrator to convince readers of Omelas existence. As a result, there are very few guidelines placed on the way readers construct Omelas, including eliminating forms of hierarchy and limiting excessiveness. Additionally, the narrator establishes that the people of Omelas, "did not use swords, or keep slaves. They were not barbarians" (278). The sparing limitations imposed on the reader allow for the people and city of Omelas to be created and recreated infinitely.

The extensive and customized versions of Omelas contribute to the plausible yet fantastical characterization of the city. As previously mentioned, the narrator tells readers about the city of Omelas in great detail, illustrating its magnificence and glory to the reader. The city is expansive and surrounded by water, meadows, and mountains and pierced by wind and sunlight. It is described as a city "bright-towered by the sea" (276). The overview of the city describes its beauty, proclaiming "Far off to the north and west the mountains stood up half encircling Omelas on her bay. The air of morning was so clear that the snow still crowning the Eighteen Peaks burned with white-gold fire across the miles of sunlit air, under the dark blue sky" (277). From the distance, the people of Omelas can hear, "a cheerful faint sweetness of the air that from time to time trembled and gathered together and broke out into the great joyous clanging of bells" (277). From this description Omelas is indeed the perfect city. Its perfection further contrasts sharply with the desolate, contained closet. Moreover, the rich descriptions of its beauty echo the descriptions from travel accounts of early colonists, depicting a land of infinite possibility.

European conquest travel journals often describe their "new worlds" in embellished terms. Written in part as propaganda for their new discovery, they describe lands which are

unimaginably beautiful and exotic. The writings of Christopher Columbus and other colonial “pioneers” often employ imagery that is similar to the narrator’s description of Omelas. For example, Christopher Columbus describes his “discovery” of America in a letter, writing, “I assure your Highnesses that these lands are the most fertile, temperate, level and beautiful countries in the world” (Columbus Oct. 17). His idealized description of America parallels the bountiful city of Omelas and its surrounding natural beauty. This description of the “New World” creates a utopian promise that is far more appealing than the lands occupied by the people his letters are addressed to. His writings further parallel Omelas in their erasure of the indigenous, or the child in the closet. There is no mention of the people that once inhabited the land. The horrific realities of conquest are glossed over, shadowed by the possibilities of the land.

Trouillot addresses the sensationalism of travel narratives, asserting, “Travel accounts, of which the numbers kept multiplying, helped fill the increasing demand for elsewhere. Some did so with reports of unicorns and floating isles, then accepted as reality by their public” (25). In comparison to “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas,” the travel journals mirror the reader’s fascination with the “elsewhere” that allows readers to accept claims that are inherently fictional. The narrator’s unique approach to describing Omelas in a manner which allows personal imagination and spontaneous details mirrors the embellished journals because it is not wholly accurate. The idealized depictions of Omelas and the “New World” as well as the creative liberties taken by both Columbus and readers establish a clear parallel between early colonialism and Omelas. Significantly, the colonial resonance further enforces Le Guin’s encouragement for readers to see Omelas in the context of the United States. Although much

more subtle, the descriptions associate Omelas with the myth of American perfection and the later inscription of Manifest Destiny (Trouillot).

Following the wondrous description of the city, the contrast with the description of the closet is startling. Although hidden “Under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas,” the closet does not seem to fit into the perfect city. The child’s home is described as dusty, cobwebbed, foul-smelling, and locked (281). The closet is a dark, hidden space and an embodiment of the repugnance Omelas lacks. In the narrative, the closet represents the spaces occupied by the indigenous, the Other of colonial discourse. The closet limits the child’s freedom and denies him/her the pleasures of sunlight, wind, and open space. Its physical space directly reduces the child. The inhabitation of the child is analogous to the forsaken spaces of the colonized. Colonial intrusion forces indigenous people to the most undesirable lands which were often unfamiliar to them.

Homi Bhabha explains the sharp distinctions between the spaces of the colonized and colonizers, writing, “The native and settler zones, like the juxtaposition of Black and White bodies, are opposed, but not in the service of ‘a higher unity’. No conciliation is possible, he concludes, for of the two terms, one is superfluous” (Williams 120). In accordance with Bhabha’s assertion, the child’s closet is superfluous when compared with the city of Omelas. It is buried below the beauty of the “settler zone” of Omelas. The child’s location, even as described by the narrator, is unknown and inconsequential. For example, the narrator casually describes the closet, “In a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings, or perhaps in the cellar of one of its spacious private homes” (281). The general location of the child is unknown and the story does not clarify whether the child is in a cellar, tool room, or closet. Readers have very little information about the inside of the closet and no concrete knowledge of the space in relation to

the city. The only definite characteristics of the closet are the dirt floor, locked door, and the dreaded mops. As Bhabha articulates, the space and conditions of the colonized are juxtaposed with the space of the colonizers without allowing any significant meaning. The insights regarding the condition of the child and its contrast with Omelas are largely facilitated by the complex narrative style of the story.

Throughout the short story, the narrator aligns him or herself with readers through the use of plural first person pronouns. The narrator shatters the fourth wall enabling readers narrative authority. In conjunction, the use of the inclusive “we” pronouns creates an intimate relationship between the reader and the narrator. By collaborating to create Omelas, the reader and the narrator become intertwined in the city of Omelas and united by their positionality as outsiders. As outsiders, readers feel as though they are spectators of Omelas who govern the city with the same authority afforded to the narrator. Their role in constructing Omelas grants them this authority. The narrative style requires readers to rely generously on the credibility of the narrator and his or her insights about Omelas. This reliance has the potential to characterize the narrator as an omnipresent and omnipotent entity. As an authority of sorts, the narrative voice encourages readers to view it as a source of guidance and identification.

In the midst of the complex reader-narrator dynamic, the narrator often steps back from the story and compares the city of Omelas to the “shared” reality of the reader and narrator. The narrator’s consciousness of the reader invites readers to acknowledge the narrator as a character of his or her own. For example, after describing the beauty of the city and the joy of the citizens, the narrator pauses, claiming, “But we do not say the words of cheer much any more. All smiles have become archaic. Given a description such as this one tends to make certain assumptions. Given a description such as this one tends to look next for the King, mounted on a splendid

stallion... But there was no king" (277-278). The narrator's assertion directly compares Omelas with the "we" reality of the reader. In this instance, the narrator acknowledges the anticipated disbelief of readers and thus demonstrates his or her understanding of the reader's reality. To assuage the reader's skepticism, the narrator acknowledges his or her shared reality with readers, appealing to the absence of cheer in their shared reality. This conscious reassurance deepens the reader's reliance on the narrator, legitimizing the narrator's authority, and creating the complex relationship between Omelas and the reality of readers.

The link between the narrator and reader is also reinforced by the narrator's claim, "They were not less complex than us" (278). Once more, the reader is directly associated with the narrator in a way that makes their cultural reality the same. In order for the narration to make sense, the reader's existence must to a certain extent coexist with the narrator's reality. This shared reality is essential for the reader's reality to be collectively compared with the Omelas. The collective comparison establishes the narrator not only as an expert of Omelas but as an authority of the reality shared with readers. The narrator's authorial voice compels readers to believe his or her assertions and even agree with them. This conscious narration feeds readers "information" in an innocuous way that invites readers to accept it as truth uncritically.

Importantly, the narrator's claims, however bleak, do not condemn the reader's society; the assertions are characterized as mere observations. This neutral analysis helps to maintain the relationship between the narrator and readers because its non-confrontational tone consciously avoids insulting readers. By aligning him or herself with readers and the shortcomings of their reality, the narrator avoids offending readers because he or she belongs to the same society flawed society as readers. This narrative style appeals to the reader because it engages with the

ideological framework of their society. With this foundation, the narrator can bridge the ideological framework of “reality” with Omelas.<sup>3</sup>

One of Omelas’ fundamental beliefs keeping the child in the closet is the belief that it must be kept in the closet. Its captivity is seen in conjunction with the Omelasians because, according to the narrator, “they know that they, like the child, are not free” (283). An ideological form of hegemony informs their belief that they are not free. Dick Hebdige illustrates the ways in which cultures employ hegemonic ideologies in very innocuous ways, explaining, “The term hegemony refers to a situation in which a provisional alliance of certain social groups can exert a ‘total social authority’ over other subordinate groups, not simply by coercion or by the direct imposition of ruling ideas, but by ‘winning and shaping consent so that the power of the dominant classes appears both legitimate and natural’ (Hall, 1977)... contained within an ideological space which does not seem at all ‘ideological’: which appears instead to be permanent and ‘natural’, to lie outside history, to be beyond particular interests” (Durham 205). In the case of Omelas, the citizens collectively exert total social authority over the child by choice. They view their happiness as a legitimate reason for exploiting the child and create reasons to reassert their right to continue their way of life. They do not question their bargain or dare to imagine solutions outside of a utopian/dystopian binary. Furthermore, the citizens allow the child’s suffering to become a natural phenomenon, an unspoken agreement outside of history. Their consent to its suffering is preconscious and characterized as something which “has to be this way.”

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<sup>3</sup> The narrator participates in colonization in these assertions. He or she assumes that readers belong to the same culture/society. This excludes readers from other societies, including colonized/postcolonial cultures. His or her assumption of a homogenous audience normalizes colonialism. This narrative assertion furthers his or her role as a mimic man.

The irony of the narrative is exemplified in the claim, “To exchange all the goodness and grace of every life in Omelas for that single, small improvement: to throw away the happiness of thousands for the chance of the happiness of one: that would be to let guilt within the walls indeed” (282). This assertion demonstrates the way the ideology of Omelas reinforces their right and obligation to colonize the child. This perception is the heart of the city’s colonial discourse. Inherent to this discourse is a supposed lack of guilt. The child’s suffering is seen as “beyond particular interests” and therefore unable to cause the Omelasians to feel guilt or blame. Although the ones who walk away demonstrate that this assertion is false, the city clings to this belief. The hegemonic order in Omelas shapes the consent of the Omelasians and constructs cultural myths to preserve this ideology.

The city’s insistence on containing the child in the closet counters James’s claim “that the fruits of such a bargain” would not be enjoyable. Letting the child out would completely destroy the colonizers perfect vision of life and force the citizens of Omelas to face their gruesome choice. The narrator’s assertion at the beginning of the story, explaining, “One thing I know there is none of in Omelas is guilt” would be entirely shattered if the child were released (279). This claim demonstrates the pervasiveness of hegemonic ideology. It also demonstrates the cost of divesting privilege; a price the people of Omelas are not willing to pay. The ideology and the rewards of maintaining colonial domination trump the morality of their choice; a choice condemned by James. Le Guin’s narrative demonstrates the difficulty of the choice that James overlooks. The Omelasians digression from James’ assertion demonstrates the incongruous morals of James and America. Le Guin challenges James’ assumption of the goodness of others by creating a society that chooses the unthinkable.

In addition to allowing Omelas to accept the bargain, Le Guin departs from James's model of the "Moral Life" is the narrative sanction for readers to want to live in Omelas. James assumes the choice is simple. The use of first-person plural in the passage even suggests that readers agree with his judgment of the wretchedness of taking the bargain. By contrast "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas," creates a safe space for readers to choose whether or not they could live in Omelas. Although the narrative favors an interpretation of Omelas as a disturbingly (im)perfect society, the narrator does not directly address the morality of the bargain. Unlike James' essay, there is no stringent condemnation of the Omelasians. Le Guin's disagreement with James regarding the willingness of people to condemn the bargain is asserted in the preface. Le Guin writes, "Where as the American James, who seems so mild, so naïvely gentlemanly—look how he says 'us,' assuming all his readers are as decent as himself!" (275-76). This assertion demonstrates her skepticism caused by James' assumption. Moreover, the story itself validates the difficulty of such a choice that James' readily dismisses.

Despite her disagreement with James, Le Guin creates a space in the narrative for those whose morals align with James'. Some of the citizens disagree so thoroughly with the choice that they leave the city altogether. Since he does not agree with the values of those who choose happiness at the suffering of one "lonely soul," James would likely want to remove himself from such a hideous system. The claims in "The Moral Philosopher and The Moral Life," suggest that James would choose to walk away from Omelas. Furthermore, his essay suggests that he would assume others would walk away as well. These departed individuals represent those who cannot justify a decision which compromises the happiness of one for many. They share the fundamental values espoused in James's essay. Furthermore, they create discord in Omelas.



Although colonial ideology is a totalizing, it is not monolithic or unquestioned. Within discourses there exists dissonance, fractures, and disagreement. In “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas,” this dissonance is expressed in the citizens who choose to remove themselves from the society. Cultural studies describe the ways in which these ideologies can fragment, explaining, “Forms cannot be permanently normalized... Moreover commodities can be symbolically ‘repossessed’ in everyday life, and endowed with implicitly oppositional meanings, by the very groups who originally produced them... The consensus can be fractured, challenged, overruled, and resistance to the groups in dominance cannot always be lightly dismissed or automatically incorporated.” (Durham 205). Fractures in Omelas cannot be lightly dismissed because of the disruption they cause in the city. Walking away from the city is the most radical choice available: those who choose to leave challenge the very structure of Omelas. They entirely reject the ideological underpinnings of Omelas and the society constructed around it.

The significance of leaving Omelas is evidenced in the narrator’s bewilderment by the departed. This is underscored by the recurrence of departures and the title of the story itself which is devoted to citizens who leave. The narrator’s inability to narrate the experience of those who depart leaves readers grappling with the same predicament. Readers are quite knowledgeable about Omelas until attempting to describe the departed. This lack of understanding results from the invisible but pervasive nature of ideology. Lois Tyson believes ideology works innocuously, she explains, “By posing as natural ways of seeing the world, repressive ideologies prevent us from understanding the material/historical conditions in which we live because they refuse to acknowledge that those conditions have any bearing on the way we see the world... the most successful ideologies are not recognized as ideologies but are thought to be natural ways of seeing the world by the people who subscribe to them” (53). The

people who choose to walk away make visible the unconscious ideologies of Omelas and directly confront the “natural” assumptions upon which the city is premised. The counter-colonial knowledge interrupts their way of viewing the world. As a result of this conflict, the Omelasians, narrator, and readers by extension, cannot reconcile this choice because it lies outside of the knowledge their ideological framework allows. The space outside of Omelas is impossible to fathom because it exists outside of the utopia/dystopia binary of the story. As a result, the space becomes liminal, unfathomable, and, to some, nonexistent.

Ideologies can be fragmented, undermined, and perverted in more than one way. Despite the inculcation of Omelas’ ideology, there are sites of resistance within the walls of the city aside from walking away. The individuals who catalyze resistance are considered figures of resistance and are crucial to creating counter-discourses. Their actions successfully fragment, undermine and pervert Omelasian ideologies. The figures of resistance include the departed, those who visit the child, the flute-player, and, most importantly, the narrator. Each figure of resistance disrupts the ideology in a unique way. Their actions expose faults in the discourses. These figures have varied degrees of resistance and varied impacts on the city. Their impacts are analyzed according to the radicalness of their resistance.

Citizens who return to view the child more than once are resisting the silence of ideology. Franz Fanon describes the concealment of colonial ideology, explaining, “A national culture under colonial domination is a contested culture whose destruction is sought in a systematic fashion. It very quickly becomes a culture condemned to secrecy” (Williams 46). The condemnation to secrecy manifests in the hidden, isolated closet the child occupies. Omelasians who do not adhere to this secrecy choose to create their own sites of tension. They acknowledge

the open secret and rupture their position in relation to the ideology. Rather than continuing to repress their knowledge of the child, they bring it to the forefront of their mind, confronting it.

In addition to those who walk away and those who visit the child, the flute-player is a figure of resistance in Omelas. He is a mysterious child enthralled in his music. The narrator directly links him with the child in the closet by addressing the child's role in making the flute-player's music possible. The narrator explains, "They know that if the wretched one were not snivelling in the dark, the other one, the flute-player, could make no joyful music" (283).

Furthermore, he is approximately the same age as the child in the closet and is the most somber character in the city. According to the story, the flute-player "never ceases playing and never sees them, his dark eyes wholly rapt in the sweet, thin magic of the tune" (280). Throughout the joyous festival his music functions as an aside: no one speaks to him but only pauses to listen.

Once he finishes playing the city's festival resumes with a roar. The narrator describes this reaction, explaining, "As if that little private silence were the signal, all at once a trumpet sounds from the pavilion near the starting line: imperious, melancholy, piercing" (280). The uproar is a response to the flute-player. It is a distraction. Their boisterous response drowns the melancholy tune and replaces its message with the mythical happiness of Omelas. Within the somber notes is a message for the people of Omelas: his music becomes a site of resistance. His music becomes a voice.

The child's dark eyes, youth, and subdued disposition attempt to communicate something to the Omelasians. Using Spivak's framework of oppression, the child is an attempt to speak on behalf of the subaltern. Through his art, the flute-player is attempting to communicate any alternative to their ideology. He is distinguished by his deviance from the joyful disposition of other Omelasians. This difference may result from his music's attempts to confront the

subjugation of the child. In compliance with their ideology, the citizens listen to his message, do not reply, and move on with their festival. They choose to remain cushioned by their ideologies. Like those who walk away, he tries to confront the ideologies at work to the extent that it is possible for him. However, he is never truly heard and moreover, he is never understood. The flute-player is removed from the utopian binary and becomes unintelligible to the citizens. As a result, the underlying message of his music is not taken seriously.

Spivak's theory concludes that the subaltern cannot speak and cannot be accurately spoken for (Maggio). The flute-player demonstrates Spivak's conclusion because his message is incomplete and does not truly represent the voice of the child. The child's message is imperfectly translated into the music of the flute-player and then retranslated by the listening Omelasians. The incomplete transmission of meaning makes it impossible for the closeted child to be heard. Although a site of resistance, the flute-player is removed from the position of the child and can only attempt to communicate on its behalf. The tensions caused by the flute-player's resistance are not as radical as the ones who walk away because his message is rooted in the ideology it attempts to undermine. Nevertheless, the music demonstrates the ways in which resistances to ideology can be discreet, creative, bold, or direct confrontations.

The most innocuous, yet powerful site of resistance in Omelas is occupied by the narrator. The narrator becomes a figure of resistance that Jenny Sharpe describes as a "mimic man." She explains, "The mimic man is a contradictory figure who simultaneously reinforces colonial authority and disturbs it. Because the colonial subject was produced through a discourse of 'civility,' [they] begin by retelling the story of the civilizing mission in a manner that demonstrates the violence of its inscriptions. The discourse of civility strains to effect a closure in the case of the subaltern, where the violence of the colonial encounter is all the more visible"

(Ashcroft 99). The narrator's rhetoric reinforces colonial authority by demonstrating the advantages Omelas's possesses. He or she significantly invests the reader in the ideology of Omelas and demonstrates the benefits of their bargain. Prior to finding out about the child (and for some, perhaps, even after) the reader is compelled to want to be a part of Omelas. Readers wants to become a part of the "elsewhere" of Omelas and the possibility it offers. However, in reinforcing and personifying the ideology, the narrator disturbs it.

By contrasting the "vapid" happiness of Omelas and the misery of the child, the bargain becomes all the more grotesque (283). The stark contrasts drawn by the narrator illustrate the deplorability of the bargain James condemns. This approach enables the narrator's mimicry to address colonial violence within the discourse of civility. Having this knowledge, readers are allowed to do with it what they will. The narrator's mimicry offers alternatives to remaining in Omelas but simultaneously humanizes those who stay. By asserting that the Omelasians were not barbarians and describing the ways in which the child's suffering made their love all the more tender, the narrator prevents readers from easily condemning their choice to stay. According to the story, "they know compassion. It is the existence of the child, and their knowledge of its existence... that they are so gentle with children" (283). In describing their attempts to compensate for the child's suffering, the narrator complicates James' assumption of the depravity of such a bargain. Consequently, the description of the rationale of Omelasians illustrates the violence inflicted on the colonized as well as the violence suffered by the colonizers.

The narrator's attempts to speak on behalf of the subaltern parallel the flute-player's endeavors to speak for the child. For example, the narrator's description of the closet yields the sympathy of readers and attempts to communicate the lived experiences of the child. As an

outsider, however, the narrator is never fully capable of speaking for the subaltern. The description is incomplete and its implications are never fully realized by the citizens, narrator, or readers. Interestingly, however, the “mimic man” narrator significantly disrupts colonial ideology by momentarily allowing the subaltern to speak. For instance, the child is one of the only characters to use first person in the story. Aside from the narration, the only other instance of first person is used collectively during the festival to embody the first person of all of the horse racers. However, the child is the only character to speak as an individual throughout the story. It cries, “Please let me out. I will be good” (281). Its cries are a significant site of resistance: the child’s voice rings clear and pleads for help. Readers are forced to directly face the horrors of the ideology which keeps the child contained and acknowledge the child’s desire to be free. This resistance is effective and blunt. The narrator’s role as the mimic man finally answers the silence of the ideology with the sound of the child’s voice.

Le Guin uses these sites of resistance to illuminate the pervasiveness of colonialism. The story exposes the exploitation and cruelty of colonialism easily hidden by colonial discourses. By creating the narrative and its sites of resistance, Le Guin creates a site of resistance in the reality of readers. Her authorial voice serves as a “mimicry” of its own, meant to appeal to readers beyond the fiction city limits of Omelas. P. L. Thomas describes this phenomenon succinctly. He writes, “Le Guin’s sparse and disturbing allegory has everything that science fiction/ speculative fiction/ dystopian fiction can offer in such a short space—a shocking other-world, a promise of Utopia tinted by Dystopia, the stab of brutality and callousness, and ultimately the penetrating mirror turned on all of us, now.” By mimicking a cultural metanarrative, Le Guin’s story becomes a complex site of resistance. Readers cannot escape the penetrating mirror “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” holds before them.

Le Guin's effectiveness as a "mimic man" is complimented by the genre of her story. Her medium for communication, like the flautist's music, best suits her goals to speak to James, readers, and on behalf of the subaltern. One of the unique advantages of science fiction in "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" is its ability to construct a reality, not entirely foreign for readers and logical enough to be plausible. Science fiction creates worlds with which readers can identify. Le Guin's approach to Omelas is consistent with the techniques of other science fiction and postcolonial science fiction authors. This tradition is demonstrated in stories such as *I Am Legend*, *District 9*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and *Midnight Robber* (Reid). The similarities between reality as it is known to readers and the constructed reality of Omelas invites readers to compare Omelas to their culture. The effectiveness of Le Guin's approach to science fiction is cemented in Omelas attempt to grapple with colonial discourse.

Postcolonial science fiction engages with Western hegemonic order in a very unique way. It blends fictional world with postcolonial theory to create a story which fits into the historical discourse of colonialism and exposes the underlying ideologies of colonization. According to The Science Fiction Foundation, "Science fiction, perhaps like no other literature, focuses on representations of science and technology; not only as it they are now but also how they could be. In contrast, postcolonial writing traditionally focuses on language, narrative and discourse as a means of circulating power between the coloniser and the colonised" (Reid). "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" succeeds in focusing on the circulation of power but digresses from traditional tropes of science fiction such as technology and scientific possibility. However, Le Guin's story can be located within the genre of science fiction because it involves the theme of the colonization of another world. According to Dr. Michelle Reid, "Science fiction doesn't have to work within, existing colonial history... [It] doesn't have to be subject to the same

assumptions or colonial legacies. This can provide a distance or freedom from existing colonial narratives or a chance to replay and re-examine power relationships. But the colonisation of other worlds raises the question of how these imagined worlds relate to "real world" colonial legacies and situations" (Reid). "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" accomplishes this because it allows readers to envision and even develop a new colonial legacy within the city itself. Furthermore, Le Guin resolves the relationship between the imagined world of Omelas and the "real world" by allowing narrator to serve as a link between the two worlds.

The duplicitous nature of postcolonial science fiction opens up new possibilities for understanding. According to Eric Smith's critique, "Rieder contends that "while stayings within the ideological and epistemological framework of the colonial discourse, [SF] exaggerates and exploits internal divisions" such that the occlusions and occultations that subtend them are (however metaphorically or allegorically) rendered apparent and available for critique" (2). The method of creating analogous realities in order to explain something is not entirely limited to science fiction. The opportunity to create and counter-discourse is often a means of resistance to the silence compelled by ideologies. In addition to creating counter-discourses, one of the tasks of postcolonial theory is to examine discourses of domination. This examination can lead to new or alternative discourses, which need not be from the perspective of colonizers. As previously mentioned, "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" fits within a larger tradition. "Poiesis Of Possibility: The Ethnographic Sensibilities Of Ursula K. Le Guin" contextualizes Le Guin's story, explaining, "By the second half of the 20th century, both science fiction writers and anthropologists had begun to plumb the more subversive potential of their respective genres. Instead of constructing the savage other to reaffirm a triumphant narrative of the white Western self, they used a vision of the other to critique conventional understandings of their own societies



and of western imperialism” (Baker- Cristales 17). Le Guin subverts dominant discourse by allowing the Omelasians to construct the child in the closet, the “savage.” The way in which they construct the child, in turn, is a reflection of their ideology instead of the child’s. “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas critiques western imperialism by demonstrating the deliberate violence of colonization and demonstrating the ways in which the Omelasians assert their “superiority.”

“Those Who Walk Away from Omelas” uses its utopian culture to demonstrate the totalizing nature of colonialism: the most perfect city is still premised on the exertion of power over another. The utopian framework allows the story to explore the power dynamics and invisible ideologies at work. As previously stated, this is characteristic of postcolonial science fiction: the genre facilitates complex cultural critiques, especially in terms of colonialism. Although the authorial intent of science fiction writers is not static or monolithic, Eric Smith asserts the deliberate and intricate nature of the genre. He explains, “Writers of postcolonial science fiction appropriate ‘the meme of colonization and the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humour, and also, with love and respect for the genre of science fiction that makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things’” (5). The beauty of Le Guin’s story lies in its ability to make social and cultural commentary without indicting the reader. Le Guin’s appropriation of colonization emerges in the crux of the story. The perverse irony of colonization is articulated in this perfect city premised on exploitation. Le Guin embellishes the city of Omelas, its people, and their happiness in a way that at times writes from the perspective of the colonizer.

In accordance with the genre, however, she then perverts it, accounts their anger, and irony of Omelas in the description of the child. Le Guin’s assertions of perfection are shattered

when readers are described the “fear, malnutrition, and neglect” the child experiences at the city’s benefit (281). As postcolonial science fiction often does, the story takes the familiar, praises it, and then proceeds to dismantle the entire utopia. While engaging with colonial discourse, it creates a critique outside of the colonizer’s narrative. It exposes the erasure and suffering of the Other and reveals colonialism’s malice. Despite this critique, Le Guin’s narrative does not demonize the Omelasians. She depicts them as people that are not exclusively colonizers and collapses/complicates the colonizer/colonized binary.

In order to redeem the colonizer and more fairly articulate their perspective the narrator closes by returning to the city of Omelas. The narrator explains the rationale of Omelas, stating, “As time goes on they begin to realize that even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom: a little vague pleasure of warmth and food, no doubt, but little more... Their tears at the bitter injustice dry when they begin to perceive the terrible justice of reality, and to accept it... They know that they, like the child, are not free” (282-283). Their perceived enslavement is laughable when juxtaposed with the suffering of the child carrying the weight of all of Omelas on its meager shoulders. However, the narrator’s assertion elicits some consideration, if not sympathy for the position of the citizens. The “justified” image of Omelas is no longer one of a perfect city. Instead Omelas is a city of people entrenched in their own happiness. They internalize their ideology so much that they no longer recognize their violent injustices.

This information crumbles the walls and towers of Omelas; the city is no longer their utopia. The narrator interrupts readers’ disillusionment, asking, “Now do you believe in them? Are they not more credible?” (283). By using the domination of the child as a validation of the city’s existence the narrator questions the possibility of a society without oppression. Implied in

this assertion is the suggestion that no place can exist without hegemony. This assumption echoes the narrator's previous admission that he or she cannot describe the place the ones who walk away go. A place outside of Omelas (and its colonial framework) is unimaginable and perhaps nonexistent. By extension, this implies that the United States without domination or colonial legacies is impossible to imagine for those within the discourse.

Postcolonial discourse emphasizes the need for exploring colonial power relations in order to account for its violence and demonstrate the exploitation of the colonized. Postcolonial theory and postcolonial science fiction engage in cultural critiques which aim to demonstrate the inherent inequality of the colonizer/colonized binary. Theorists believe that the exposure of this binary offers a counter-discourse as well as the tools to dismantle these systems. For example, "Said observes that the pressing task for such intellectuals is 'explicitly to universalize the crisis, to give greater human scope to what a particular race or nation suffered, to associate that experience with the suffering of others.' Such a totalizing exercise, bearing a close affinity with what Jameson calls transcoding, does not entail the abandonment of historical specificity so much as it 'guards against the possibility that a lesson learned about oppression in one place will be forgotten or violated in another place or time'" (Smith 195). Le Guin's success parallels the successes of intellectuals because it universalizes oppression in an impactful way. Her story demonstrates firsthand the myths of domination, ideologies which permit it, and its repercussions for both the colonizer and colonized. Moreover, it places this information within a larger cultural context. This broad context can be applied to early colonialism, social patterns and responses, and the contemporary "Omelas" embedded in American society.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Le Guin's story does not solely function as an allegory for colonialism. The richness of the narrative allows for numerous interpretations. Moreover, the genre of science fiction does not limit the story's application to other instances of oppression. As quoted by Jameson and Said, the obligation of for intellectuals (and writers) is to universalize oppression to prevent others from forgetting the underlying lessons of power and domination. I invite

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readers to explore the frameworks advanced by William James and “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” to determine the underlying lessons in these works. Furthermore, readers are invited to find an instance, historical or fictional, which appeals to them and “guards against the possibility” that they will forget about the suffering of others. Other approaches to Le Guin’s text might include an analysis of the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, feminist movements, the LGBT Movement, and the othering of transgender/transsexual/gender nonconforming or nonspecific individuals within the LGBT movement.